

The art of the immigrant experience

BY SAM LEVIN
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CUBAN IMMIGRANT Tania Bruguera is spending one year on a single art project — though some walking by her work in Corona may not even realize it's art.

As part of a project she calls Immigrant Movement International, the performance artist is overseeing a space on Roosevelt Ave. where she displays art of all different media and provides social services for locals. Bruguera even opens up the space to community-based groups.

She got the idea after living in Chicago and Paris, where she began to observe common patterns in the immigrant experience.

"You have to redefine who you are when you go to another place. You have to reevaluate where you came from. It's a process of trying to belong," said Bruguera, 43, who moved to Corona as part of the project.

Bruguera said didn't want to make art that just comments on immigration. She wanted to have a more direct impact through what she calls "useful art."

Her project, sponsored by the Queens Museum of Art and Creative Time, a public arts organization, has morphed into a space that is both a gallery and a gathering place for neighborhood residents and groups.

Corona was the perfect location to start the effort, said Bruguera, who wants to bring the project to other locations across the globe over several years.

She moved to Queens this year and will remain in the borough until January.

"This is the beauty of Corona — the unexpected solidarity, the unexpected new vision of the world they are building together," she said, noting how cultures mix. Equadorans learn Korean words and Chinese residents learn bits of Spanish.

"This project has been one that really embraces a sense of community," Queens Museum Director Tom Finkelppearl said.



Tania Bruguera at the Immigrant Movement International headquarters. Photo by Christie M. Farriella

Local organizations host a range of activities in the space, including language classes, immigrant rights lessons and video-editing workshops.

"It has been really useful," said Valeria Treves, executive director of New Immigrant Community Empowerment, which teaches English classes there. "We're small organizations. It's hard to pay for spaces."

Alvaro Rodas, director of the Corona

Youth Music Project, added: "It's an oasis to Corona."

Merisi Sanchez, a Jackson Heights resident visiting on a recent afternoon with her children, said there's nothing else like it.

"This is very nice for children. We don't have any other space to bring them," she said.

"I think it's very welcoming to people," said her 11-year-old daughter Alejandra. "I love it."